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MAY 04 2000

DSSD CENUS 2000 PROCEDURES AND OPERATIONS MEMORANDUM SERIES #G-23

MEMORANDUM FOR Brian Monaghan
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Attention: Management Training Branch
 Field Division

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Subject: Observation of Local Census Office in Providence, RI

Introduction

As part of my evaluation work, I have a special interest in learning about how non-English speakers deal with the census and the numerous language assistance programs. I recently visited the Providence, RI Local Census Office (LCO) to observe the Questionnaire Assistance Centers (QACs) in areas with high levels of non-English speakers.

Providence has seen a dramatic increase since the 1990 census in the ethnically diverse populations, namely Hispanic and Asian (mostly Cambodian). I also spoke with the LCO Partnership Specialist and the QAC Office Operations Supervisor (OOS) to learn more about special challenges with different language groups. The Assistant Manager for Field Operations spoke with me about the LCO tract action plans for hard-to-enumerate areas, which frequently have high incidences of linguistically-isolated households. These tract action plans have specific goals for each hard-to-enumerate tract. The Decennial Statistical Studies Division will be using these Summary Tract Action plans in the evaluation of the "1990 Data for Census 2000 Planning."

I visited a few QACs and accompanied the Partnership Specialist to some of her appointments with community groups to get a better understanding of the needs of the partners. I was very impressed with the caliber of people that were hired to work in the LCO, especially the Partnership Specialist. She is very well-known and well-connected in the community, especially among the Hispanic groups. Most of the suggestions below are from the local office staff.

A summary of specific points can be found at the end of this report.

Issues Related to QACs

The Partnership Specialist had the following comments and suggestions for Partners and QACs:

- ▶ *Background.* Places such as day care centers, food banks, clothing banks, community immigrant and ethnic centers, health centers, etc., usually have case managers and have established a certain level of trust with their clients. In many instances, clients request that their case managers help them fill out the census forms, regardless of whether the site was also a QAC. These case managers have usually not been trained to provide questionnaire assistance, nor have they been sworn in. That is not necessarily a problem, since many people request assistance of those in whom they already have trust.
- ▶ *Suggestion.* The Partnership Specialist mentioned that her particular LCO was allotted hours for paid QAC staff. She suggested that it might be more effective, in many instances, to find the centers mentioned above, train the regular staff as QAC volunteers, and reimburse the sites for the use of the *space*, and not pay the staff. This option should be further investigated. This suggestion has many benefits, because the case managers are usually the best people to help their clients, yet they are not able to take on a second job during the same hours as their regular shifts. This would provide a few strong places that normally serve the public rather than a lot of sites with limited hours. She mentioned that many places such as libraries want to help, but they are not as successful because people do not normally go there for assistance in filling out forms.
- ▶ The QAC OOS said that although she feels that the QACs are successful and that the opening date was a good one, they should have started sooner in establishing relationships with the site contacts. The material they received in targeted languages arrived rather late, and had they received it sooner, they could have worked more with the site contacts to distribute the information even before the sites opened. They had an excess supply of Chinese material. Targeted material was translated by community organizations into Portuguese and Cambodian. Information about privacy was also translated into Thai and Laotian.
- ▶ Providence has many high-rises for the elderly population, and QACs were set up at some of these to assist those residents that have difficulty in seeing, filling out the forms, etc. I asked if the QAC OOS had received the large print version of the language guide, and she did not know what I was talking about. I am not sure if she knew about the large print version or if it had been excluded from the QAC kit.

- ▶ I visited the Cape Verdean American Community Development Center (CACD) and spoke with the QAC clerk there. She had set up her assistance desk near the food pantry, which received a steady stream of visitors. As people would get their food, she would ask them if they had heard about the Census, if they had filled out the form, and let them know they could ask her for help.
- ▶ *Typical questions received at the QACs/LCOs.* There were many complaints about the length of the form (not too surprising), privacy issues, receiving both the long and the short forms, and the advance letter. Many who had requested a form in another language were worried that they had not yet received their form, and then wondered why they still received the form in English. In response to complaints and questions about the length of the form and intrusive nature of the questions, the LCO staff answering the phones at the QAC OOS desk told the respondents to “answer the questions that you are most comfortable with.” Is this what we want the LCO staff to be telling respondents?
- ▶ *Telephone Questionnaire Assistance “rerouting” necessary.* Because the LCO was receiving many calls about the questionnaire itself, a few of the QAC clerks were on shifts to answer the phone and address these complaints. These clerks were trained in the normal QAC clerk training procedures, and as a whole, did a good job answering these questions. A positive aspect of this “local TQA” was that the respondents probably would have gotten even more irritated had they been rerouted to the national toll-free number. However, they were not keeping a log of the calls and reasons for the calls, and thus were losing that information.
- ▶ I believe that the fact sheets arrived only a few weeks before the opening of the QACs. The QAC OOS suggested that it would have been more useful to have the fact sheets a couple of months earlier than when they got them. This would help get the information out to the people earlier, and the fact sheets could have been translated in a more timely fashion. Some of the fact sheets were translated by local groups.

Issues Related to Community Organizations

- ▶ *Local Advertising.* A local Spanish radio station is having a \$1000 lottery for those that can prove that the form was filled out. I have no idea how this proof will be shown.
- ▶ *Local Consortium.* Twenty local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have given \$30,000 to non-traditional groups (Nigerian, Haitian, Columbian-American, Dominican-American, Native American) to help with the census. This money was given to groups that want to help but do not have the means to do so. The Partnership Specialist helped organize this.

- ▶ Newport, RI, has an increasing number of persons from Mexico and Guatemala. The United for Justice Committee got a grant from the consortium to help with the census. In Woonsocket, RI, the African-American and Latino communities also received grants.
- ▶ *Suggestion.* Ask groups to help participate in promoting the census, and provide monies for them to do so. The smaller, non-traditional groups could apply for up to \$1000, and follow strict guidelines on what can and can not be done in the programs. (This suggestion was made by the Partnership Specialist.)
- ▶ *Census in Schools.* The Partnership Specialist feels that the Census in Schools material went out too late for many teachers to incorporate it into their lesson plans.

Issues Related to the 1990 Data for Census 2000 Planning

- ▶ *Training.* The Partnership Specialist received the database, but received no training on how to use it.
- ▶ *Contact Profile Usage Management System(CPUMS).* The Partnership Specialist did not have access to CPUMS, which would have greatly helped her keep record of her contacts. She did not receive the Internet and network access that were promised. Her laptop computer was rarely used, as she did not have access to the programs she needed.
- ▶ *Partnership Goals.* She mentioned that everyone knew the main goal, especially as it related to the How America Knows What America Needs program, but she did not receive specific goals in terms of how many partnerships, etc.

Visits to Local Places (Community/QAC Sites, etc.)

- ▶ I made a visit with the Partnership Specialist to a local grocery store that caters to the Hispanic population. This site is used as a QAC some of the time, also, but the QAC clerk only arrived as we were leaving. We spent about one hour there, and I observed the specialist asking customers questions about the census as they walked in and out of the store. She also presented them with a census pin-as she asked the questions. Most of her questions were very general, such as "Have you heard about the Census?", "How did you hear about the Census?", "Did you already receive your form?", "Have you filled it out?". Following are some of the comments received:
 - ▶ One man in his twenties said that his teacher had told him that the census was an invasion of privacy, and that there were too many questions. He mentioned that he had seen and heard some of the TV and radio ads. The specialist explained the confidentiality agreement, and it appeared that some of his fears were assuaged.

- ▶ A few people were concerned since they had requested a Spanish form, but they had “received an English form instead.” The specialist explained that the Spanish form would be arriving shortly. The advance letter apparently did not clearly make the point that the forms would arrive in a couple of weeks. (I recognize that the letter clearly states this fact in the five languages, but cognitively speaking, this message did not register with some of the respondents.)
- ▶ Another twenty-something did not seem to care—he said that his parents always fill out the forms that come.
- ▶ Most people had heard about the census through the advertising campaign, others through word-of-mouth, and still others only when the form actually arrived.
- ▶ We spoke with the QAC clerk at that grocery store, and he said that he knows that some people are immediately throwing out the form when they receive it. He suggested that the best way to reach people is by word-of-mouth, and an ongoing awareness of the census.
- ▶ I spoke with a French-speaking clerk at a QAC located at the International Institute. He indicated that he picked that center because it is well-known. At first glance, it would seem that the location within the center was a good one, since it was on the main floor. However, all of the classes are on that floor, and students generally do not have time to obtain assistance during their breaks. The Partnership Specialist suggested to me that it would make more sense to place the QAC in another part of the building, nearer to where people normally go to get assistance.
- ▶ I accompanied the Specialist to Progreso Latino, a community center that teaches English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, among other services. She met with all (approximately 35) the ESL students for about fifteen minutes and explained to them the importance of the census, asked them if they had received their forms, where they had heard about the census, etc. We distributed Census paraphernalia, and she answered questions they had. As she had done at the grocery store, she assuaged fears of privacy, explained why those who had requested a Spanish form still received an English one, and encouraged them to fill out their forms. As expected, there was much confusion about the Hispanic origin question.
- ▶ We visited a temporary agency that also has a branch with a “Welfare to Work” program. The staff there had some complaints about the testing and hiring of enumerators. The staff, under the welfare program, have a certain amount of time to get these clients into a job. The LCO had tested clients on-site for census jobs, and built up their expectations, only to never provide any feedback about jobs. To the LCO’s credit, its staff were told that they needed to recruit so many people, but at the same time, many potential enumerators were lost because no feedback was given. Many of them have found jobs elsewhere. Presumably this occurs in many locations, and it is difficult to provide

immediate feedback to applicants. However, in the interest of public relations and good customer service, more effort needs to be made to communicate to applicants when and from whom they should expect to hear about a job. If the census recruiters have no plans to call applicants that do not qualify, then that information needs to be made known.

Summary Tract Action Plans

- ▶ I was interested in learning how the LCO used the “1990 Data for Census 2000 Planning,” if at all. I inquired about this, and was directed to the Assistant Manager for Field Operations(AMFO). In June 1999, he received a list of hard-to-enumerate tracts and was instructed to provide specific plans for each of those tracts (i.e., special operations such as blitz and paired enumeration, bilingual enumerators, etc.). I determined that these tract action plans would be invaluable to my evaluation of the use of the database. The AMFO had done a great job in specifically identifying plans to use in these areas.

In general, I was impressed with the quality of people at the LCO, and their efforts to work and produce results in an imperfect system do not go unnoticed. However, much can be learned from this single visit.

- Greater effort needs to be made to get the QACs in locations and community organizations that already serve the public, especially groups that are historically undercounted, namely renters, young adults, welfare recipients, and recent immigrants
- Train the existing staff to work as volunteers since they already do much in the way of census assistance for their existing clients.
- Provide census information (fact sheets, etc.) to the local census staff for more timely distribution to community organizations. This will facilitate the translation of those fact sheets into languages that are more needed in the area.

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